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ABSTRACT

This guide is concerned with the increasing number of women returning to college and the need for academic, personal and vocational counseling programs specifically designed for them. Barriers are presented which affect re-entry women but which can be alleviated through counseling. A wide range of ways in which institutions can be more responsive to the concerns of re-entry women are suggested, including how to: (1) help personnel provide better services: (2) facilitate the decision to return to school: and (3) provide support and ongoing academic, personal and career counseling. Counseling and support services for special populations among re-entry women are discussed as well as sex bias in testing and the legal implications of Title IX of the Education Act of 1972 and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, which prohibit sex and age discrimination in programs at institutions receiving federal funds. (NRB)

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TION DRAFT

The C ounseling Needs of Re-entry Women*

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WANTED: Your Opinion

As part of its WEEA grant on the educational needs of re-entry women and other nontraditional postsecondary students, the Project on the Status and Education of Women seeks your reactions and comments on e ch one of the papers developed. Please help us by filling out the brief questionnaire at the back of this paper and return it by September 30, 1980 in the pre-paid envelope we have provided. We look forward to receiving your suggestions.

INTRODUCTION

The numbers of women eturning to college campuses throughout the coun cantly in the last decade. y have increased signifithat between 1975 and 19 e Census Bureau reports between the ages of 24 and the numbers of women 187 percent. This figure is 4 returning to school rose than the number of men w almost four times higher ing the same time period. o returned to school durwomen—those women sin e phenomena of re-entry who return to higher educa e, married or divorced sence of five years or mo on after an extended abstay.[1] —is one that is here to

An additional study co pleted by the Carnegie Co ncil in 1980 projects at by the year 2000, 52 percent of all undergradua students will be women and that 50 percent of all u dergraduates will be over the age of 22. The study rther concludes that the returning women will help set a 23 percent decline in enrollment of the traditio al 18-22 year old student.[2]

Returning women are an asset to the institution from an educational standpoint brings both maturity and a well. The re-entry woman campus and classroom. She ealth of experience to the diversification to the gener adds a unique flavor and serve an important functio student body. She may er women on campus. Once s a role model for youngdo extremely well in their s n school returning women dies.[3]

Re-entry women have become and will continue to be a very visible and important component of the general student body at colleges throughout the country. As such, two-year, four-year and graduate institutions may want to develop programs for this constantly growing student population. Academic, personal and vocational counseling programs specifically designed for re-entry women have been, and will continue to be, a service of great importance to all women returning to higher education.

The following pages identify numerous barriers which commonly affect re-entry women but which can be alleviated through the provision of counseling services specifically designed for these women. Additionally, ways in which institutions can be more responsive to the concerns of re-entry women are suggested. Whether or not a particular suggestion is appropriate will depend on the characteristics of the institution and those of its re-entry students. A wide range of possible actions is included so that institutions can pursue those most appropriate to their individual circumstances. Institutions are also likely to find many of the ideas and suggestions in this paper helpful with respect to other nontraditional students as well. The paper may also serve as a guide for evaluating current services.

* This paper was written by Le ibeth Weinstein. Staff from the Women's Re-entry Project, and the Project on the Status and Education of Women also co tributed to the research and development of this paper. Jean O'Gorman did some of the initial research.

FIELD EVALUATION DRAFT: T is paper was developed under Grant #G0079-01070 from the Women's Educational Equity Act Program of the Department of ducation. Opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the position or the policy of the Department of Education, or th Association of American Colleges, and no official endorsement should be inferred. For further information, contact the Wome s Re-entry Project, Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges, 1818 R Street, NW, ashington, DC 20009 (202) 387-1300.

Re-entry Women and Counseling: Who, What and Why?

Like all groups of students, re-entry women may have particular problems and concerns which may necessitate special services during the initial phases of academic re-entry. Such programs can smooth the academic transition process and can increase retention for these students.

Counseling services which deal with re-entry women must be based upon an understanding of who re-entry women are, how they differ from traditional students and what their specific concerns are with respect to academic, vocational and personal counseling.

Who Are Re-entry Women?

Factors such as age, maturity, background, experience, responsibilities and objectives make re-entry women significantly different from the traditional 18 to 22 year old student on campus. Additionally, as a group, re-entry women themselves differ considerably with respect to many factors, such as:

- ***age.*** Re-entry women can be anywhere between the ages of 25 to 80+. The majority fall between the ages of 28 and 50.
- ***marital status.*** Re-entry women may be single, married, divorced, or widowed, they may have infants, school-age children, grown children, or be childless.
- ***race or ethnicity.*** The race or ethnicity of returning women may vary considerably within a given institution.
- ***class.*** While continuing education was once viewed primarily as a middle class phenomenon, this is no longer true. Re-entry women may be economically deprived, working class, upwardly mobile, middle or upper class.
- ***education.*** Some may never have attended college; others will be completing undergraduate degrees started previously; still others will be beginning or completing graduate work. Some will continue with the same major or field chosen earlier; others will have made marked shifts in their interests. Some may have been out of school for five years; others may last have attended school as much as thirty or thirty-five years ago.
- ***work experience.*** Some may be displaced homemakers who have little or no work experience; others may have extensive volunteer experience. A re-entry woman may have years of work experience and return to school to advance on-going careers or to start new ones.

Why Do They Return To School?

Although women return to school for a variety of reasons, economic factors are often the single most important cause for returning. Most women returning to school do so in order to find careers and/or training to support themselves or their families. In addition, many women seek further education in order to obtain jobs appropriate to their level of ability. As a contributing partner or as the sole provider, most women both need and want to work. Additional reasons include: a) desire to change careers or advance; b) intellectual challenge of academic stimulation; c) desire for self-improvement and extended horizons; d) professional contacts.

What Do Re-entry Women Need?

Numerous obstacles impede the re-entry process and transition.[4] These deterrents may include:

- ***institutional barriers*** policies and procedures with respect to applications, admissions, enrollment, transfer of credit, scheduling, etc.);
- ***situational obstacles*** (children in need of day care and/or after-school supervision, transportation difficulties, financial limitations or constraints, etc.); and/or
- ***personal concerns*** (general lack of confidence with respect to skills and abilities, academic insecurity, unsupportive family or spouse, feelings of guilt, etc.).

These barriers often make it difficult for re-entry women to return to school.

Re-entry women need services which are related to their unique situation.[5] Good academic, personal and vocational counseling programs can often make the difference in the transition back to school for a returning woman. While academic, personal and career counseling are the three critical components of a college counseling program, these services are often overlapping and the line where one may end and another begin may be indistinguishable.

- ***Academic counseling:*** Students who have been out of school need help in getting information and assistance dealing specifically with programs, courses, and requirements.
- ***Personal counseling:*** The re-entry experience can sometimes be difficult or overwhelming. Often women need some time and a place where they can examine, share, or discuss those issues which may be affecting their lives and their educational experience.
- ***Career or vocational counseling:*** Because the majority of re-entry women want education related to jobs, exploration of career options and choices is necessary to assist them in planning their education.

Counseling: Types of Programs

Whether academic, personal or career-oriented, counseling services often go far beyond the traditionally defined one-on-one types of counseling. Services within an institution are usually varied and can include:

- traditional individual counseling
- individual "peer" counseling
- group counseling
- support groups; peer or professionally facilitated
- "rap" groups
- assertiveness training and values clarification groups
- brown bag lunch groups
- "special interest" groups, such as divorced women, or mothers of pre-school children
- credit or non-credit courses which focus on specific subjects, such as career guidance, math avoidance, study skills or job preparation
- weekend seminars
- pre-admission programs designed to aid a woman in her decision on whether or not to return to school
- parenting courses for those who use child care services on campus, or for re-entry parents in general

Where Can These Services Be Provided?

Counseling is often provided formally and informally in a variety of settings throughout the institution, such as:

- continuing education or re-entry programs
- women's centers
- counseling centers
- administrative offices
- deans' offices
- admissions offices
- career planning offices
- academic departments
- financial aid offices
- minority affairs offices or centers
- health centers

Helping Personnel Provide Better Services

What the Institution Can Do

Because counseling occurs in a variety of places within the institution, people providing these services may need help in dealing more effectively with older women students. To help personnel provide better services, and institution could do the following:

- **provide materials about re-entry women to inform personnel** throughout the institution who are likely to provide informal or formal counseling.
- **provide materials for personnel to be given directly to re-entry women** to inform them about special services and programs. For example, information about child care services could be distributed by a variety of offices serving students.
- **provide information to personnel about campus services for re-entry women,** so that they can more effectively refer these students to other services where appropriate.
- **provide formal or informal training to those who might provide informal or formal counseling to students.** For example, brown bag lunches for personnel or training seminars might be held.
- **set up a committee composed of personnel from each of the student services** which are in a position to provide counseling services to students. The committee could help coordinate services, develop materials and programs, and also plan training for personnel.

Going Back to School: What Might Hold Women Back

The first problem confronting re-entry women is simply how to go about returning to school; a woman's lack of familiarity with the multitude of academic procedures coupled with inflexibility in the institutional process can serve as deterrents to re-entry. Additionally, non-supportive or even hostile attitudes by administrators, faculty or staff may discourage potential re-entry students. Other barriers include those situational obstacles that impede her decision to re-enter academe. She may have pre-school children who require day care while she is in class or studying; she may lack immediate financial resources for tuition and books; and she may also have to deal with an unsupportive family, spouse or employer who is resistant to her decision to return to school.

Unclear academic goals, a previous inconsistent or poor academic record or a "patchwork" of previous work and transcripts, may further cause many prospective students to hesitate to return to school.

Personal issues may be an additional barrier to returning to school. Many women feel a fundamental lack of confidence and insecurity about their ability to succeed in an academic environment. This feeling may be particularly acute for those who have been both out of school and out of work for many years. Apprehension about skills and abilities, such as taking notes, recalling material, writing papers, taking exams and using the library services may be powerful deterrents to the re-entry process. Fear, usually unrealistic, that she cannot keep up with the academic pace with the younger students in her classes, may result in a general reluctance to enter the academic environment.

Returning to school also involves a large investment of time as well as a rescheduling of priorities and responsibilities. Women with families and/or jobs must arrange a schedule to accommodate their academic, household and/or professional responsibilities. Time must be found not only for classes, but research, studying and library time. Juggling multiple roles is often cited by women as the single most difficult aspect of returning to school.

Furthermore, because women often view themselves primarily in nurturing and mother/wife roles, re-entry women may feel "guilty" in pursuing independent

activities outside of their families. They may feel "selfish" in using the family's financial resources, and neglectful of their spouses and/or children.

Outreach: Facilitating the Decision To Return

The provision of information, including information about counseling services, at the very beginning of the re-entry process can often make the difference as to whether or not a returning woman participates in and benefits from postsecondary education. Through specially designed outreach programs, institutions can aid a woman in taking the first step forward in returning to school.[6]

What the Institution Can Do

- **Compile a booklet or brochure aimed at potential returning women students containing information about programs and services.** Distribute it at central locations within the community, such as libraries, supermarkets, churches and Y.W.C.A.'s. Include it in mailings to prospective students, along with application materials and course catalogs. The University of Minnesota and the University of California at Berkeley, for example, are among a number of schools which have compiled handbooks of general information and available services for re-entry women.
- **Encourage the development of statewide or regional materials** which list available programs and services at area schools.
- **Conduct meetings** at local elementary or secondary schools, libraries, other community centers and on the college campus to acquaint prospective students with the institution's services and application procedures. Hold these meetings during the day as well as in the evening in order to best accommodate people's schedules.
- **Provide free pre-admission academic and career counseling** in order to aid a woman in her decision on whether or not to return to school.
- **Offer "re-entry" courses for interested women** in the community. Many schools throughout the country have developed courses and/or programs specifically for those contemplating returning to school. Ranging from a one-time session, a several week or year long course, which may be credit or non-credit, these programs help the student to clarify her needs, to strengthen her skills, and to broaden her knowledge of both academic process and institutional procedure. These programs can also offer important guidance in the application and admissions process.
- **Provide information on specific programs which are available for re-entry women to educational brokering services** in the area. Many women use these services in order to obtain information and receive guidance on the re-entry process.

Ongoing Academic Counseling: An Importar Component of Academic Success t

Academic counseling is usually provided by f and in some instances, deans and counselors. aculty, services initially offer general information on r These ments, courses and credit transfer. Women require- to school after a prolonged absence may have urning concerns with respect to academic counseling. istinct concerns, such as unfamiliarity with academ These ricula, coupled with a general lack of knowledg cur- repect to credit transfer, course and major re with ments, and scheduling can be best remedied by quire- cific training of those administrators, faculty an spe- who serve as academic advisors to the re-entr staff lation. popu-

What the Institution Can Do

While many of these problems are commor students in general, some modifications and a to all to existing procedures may be especially heditions re-entry women. These women, like other sful to need help in academic planning; encourage dents, enter non-traditional fields of study; and lon ent to planning with respect to career or further edu range opportunities. ational

- **Assign re-entry women to an academic upon enrolling in a degree program.** En advisor and support continuing education dean ourage selors and trained personnel to serve as coun- academic advisors until a woman has interim upon an academic major. This may be pa ecided helpful to students who are returning t icularly with a substantial number of credits but school sure of their major. are un-
- **Academic advisors should meet with their advisees during the earliest stages of re-entry to school.** Some institutions plan a gene turning demic orientation specifically for re-entry al aca- and their advisors the summer prior to tudents semester. This enables the students to: a) the fall acquainted with their advisor; b) meet become entry students; c) learn about the instit ther re- facilities, policies, and programs; and d) tion, its think about planning courses, schedules, egin to etc.
- Because the first few months are often difficult, **academic advisors should come** most **meet regularly with their re-entry advisee inue to** their first semester at school. Informa during meetings with academic advisors to dis group academic re-entry process, etc. are ofte uss the
- At many institutions, for example, the Uni helpful. Pittsburgh, **specific academic advisors a** ersity of **nated to work solely with returning stude desig-** advisor has an understanding of the ats. The concerns of returning women and can pr adem portant support and information during vide im- semester(s). e initial
- **Communicate the institution's commitn ent and**

concern about re-entry women directly to academic counselors. This could be done in several ways, such as a policy statement or a letter from the dean or president.

- **Provide information specifically geared to academic counselors concerning re-entry women.**
- **Hold special training sessions or meetings about academic counseling of re-entry women.**
- **Provide academic counselors with information and materials about other campus services for returning women,** so that they can effectively refer students who need additional services or information.
- **Periodically assess academic counseling of re-entry students.** Obtain information from academic counselors as to any difficulties they may experience with re-entry women. Obtain similar information from re-entry women students.

Personal Counseling: An Overview of the Literature

The literature on counseling adult women cites a number of interpersonal issues and psychological characteristics which are common to many re-entry women:

- Many women have always been dependent on "others"; moving from a dependent family relationship as a child to a similar dependency on a husband and family, as an adult. Thus, the re-entry process is a time of new and independent identity awareness. In order to achieve academically and personally they must make decisions and act independently of their family and friends.[7]
- As women engage in activities outside the home, they feel a greater need for personal success and achievement.[8]
- Women returning to higher education are often involved in a search for integrity and meaning in their lives.[9]
- The longer a woman has been out of school, the greater her fears are likely to be with respect to returning to school, including fear of dulled skills and intellectual abilities; fear of failure; fear of coping with added pressures and responsibilities; as well as guilt concerning financial expenditures for her education, and time spent away from her family.[10]
- Societal prejudices with respect to age may make an older woman feel physically, socially, and psychologically out of place on campus. This may lead to a heightened sense of aging and a general sense of worthlessness.[11]
- Re-entry women sometimes feel an initial sense of loss when they return to school: loss of community and personal networks, loss of ongoing contact with their spouses and children, loss of economic status by going back to school full-time (if they have been working prior to returning to school).[12]

As with any stage of development and transition, the initial re-entry process may be a time of renewed "identity crisis."[13] It is often a time of self-evaluation, self-identification and personal growth. However, it may also be coupled with painful self-doubt and anxiety. Supportive services can enable a woman to discuss and deal with her feelings as she searches for new meaning in her life. In most instances, re-entry women may be best served by programs specifically designed for returning women (e.g., continuing education for women programs, women's centers, etc.). However, many schools may not have the personnel nor the financial resources to develop such a program. Some have chosen to accommodate their counseling services for re-entry women within already established, institutional channels, such as the university counseling center. In those schools that do not offer specific programs for the returning woman, the counseling center can play an effective role if it provides services relevant to the needs of re-entry women. (In addition to the suggestions listed below, those listed under the section dealing with academic and vocational counseling may also be appropriate.)

What the Institution Can Do

- **Increase counselors' awareness of the concerns of re-entry women** by providing them with materials and training.
- **Periodically assess effectiveness of counseling programs** for returning women.
- **Develop outreach activities and materials about counseling services** so that re-entry women know they are welcome.
- **Provide counseling services at a variety of times** (such as evenings or early morning) so that re-entry women with heavy schedules have the opportunity to participate. (Many women whose lives involve family, work and academic responsibilities cannot use the counseling center during regularly scheduled 9-5 hours.) The University of Michigan, for instance, has drop-in hours as part of their Center for Continuing Education of Women.
- **Include women counselors on the staff,** particularly women who have gone through the re-entry process themselves, if possible.
- **Include stories about re-entry women in publicity about counseling services.** Mention re-entry women in brochures and other materials.
- **Develop special support services** for returning women (see next section).
- **Evaluate tests for appropriateness with older students.** (Many test norms were developed only for traditional students and may not be satisfactory or accurate for older students.)
- **Examine all tests for sex bias.**

Support Is the Issue

"Returning women don't need therapy; they need suport."

"I needed encouragement from people who had gone back to say it wasn't strange for someone my age to be on campus."[14]

Support is a critical concern of returning women. The general concensus among those working with the re-entry population, as well as re-entry women themselves, is that rather than traditional psychotherapeutic services, most re-entry women simply need encouragement and support. Many counseling centers or continuing education programs can and do provide support services. In those cases where long term therapy is needed, the center or program can still offer a woman important educational planning and career choice information and support.

What the Institution Can Do

Counseling centers and re-entry programs can provide a number of social support services for re-entry women, including:[15]

- **Develop a continuing education center or re-entry women's program.**
- **Bring in former or current re-entry students to talk with new applicants or students.** George Washington University's (DC) Continuing Education for Women Center uses former or upper-class re-entry women as an integral part of their group counseling programs.
- **Hold brown-bag lunches for re-entry women** to meet each other and discuss common concerns.
- **Utilize peer counseling.**
- **Develop ongoing support groups for returning women.** The groups may be general or specific to particular problems, such as returning graduate students, student mothers or displaced homemakers.
- **Publish a newsletter about re-entry women.** Many schools distribute a monthly or bi-monthly newsletter aimed at both current as well as prospective re-entry women.
- **Establish a formal association of returning women students.**
- **Hold a special orientation meeting for re-entry women.**
- **Hold a reception or picnic** for re-entry women and their families.
- **Develop and maintain materials about other on-campus programs and services,** such as financial aid and housing.
- **Develop lists of off-campus services** (such as child care centers, emergency homemaker care and social services).

Career or Vocational Counseling

Most re-entry women attend school with job preparation as a major goal. Many of these women will *have* to work when they finish school, in order to support themselves, or their families. In fact, many women feel that vocational planning and career counseling is the single most important component of any successful counseling experience. On the other hand, it is in the area of career development and counseling that the greatest numbers of returning women feel a tremendous gap in services provided to them.

The needs of re-entry women with respect to career counseling are different from the needs of the typical 18 to 22 year old student. Some of the most frequent problems which re-entry women face with respect to career development and vocational counseling include: a lack of information on career choices and options, feelings of insecurity and self-doubt with respect to procuring employment, coupled with an overall unfamiliarity with the process of how to go about seeking and applying for a job.

What the Institution Can Do

- **Designate a specific location and specific individuals who will provide vocational/career counseling for re-entry women.** At the University of Pittsburgh, for instance, one individual works specifically with liberal arts evening division students, offering ongoing career counseling and job information.
- **Begin offering career planning/vocational counseling services to women in the earliest stages of their academic re-entry.** Some vocational planning services hold seminars during orientation. Others print information packets and distribute them to all re-entry students at the beginning of each academic year.
- **Assess vocational and career materials for age bias as well as sex bias,** e.g., do engineering pamphlets ever show older women? Develop new materials where appropriate or necessary.
- **Assess vocational interest inventories for appropriateness with older students.**
- **Plan a variety of seminars on career planning and vocational information, held at different times and locations for re-entry women.** This enables those women, who may have heavy schedules, to attend.
- **Bring in women who have been through the academic and job re-entry process to talk about the job market, needed skills, career possibilities, and personal experiences.** The University of Michigan holds seminars on getting or starting a job which are entitled, "Workable Ideas from Women Who Have Done It," bringing in former re-entry women to discuss different types of job opportunities.
- **If possible, encourage re-entry women to get internship experience for credit.** This not only pro-

vides an opportunity to explore career directions but can often lead to future job possibilities as well.

- **Keep a schedule of job recruiters coming to campus in the continuing education office and in other offices serving re-entry women.**
- **Develop ways to encourage job recruiters to consider older women students.**
- **Reach out to special populations;** keep abreast of special vocational/professional training programs for minority and handicapped women.
- **Gather and post information on possible employment opportunities** within neighboring cities and towns for re-entry women.
- **Provide information about vocational training programs** which are specifically geared towards recruiting women into nontraditional fields.
- **Hold workshops on resume writing, job applications and interviewing procedures.**
- **Work closely with re-entry women to see that all volunteer experiences are incorporated into their resumes.** Make sure that all unpaid work is portrayed in a positive manner.

Counseling and Support Services for Special Populations Among Re-entry Women[16]

Special populations of re-entry women may include:

- Asian American
- Black American
- Hispanic American
- Native American
- women of mixed heritage
- handicapped women
- economically disadvantaged women
- elderly women
- displaced homemakers and widows

To date, little has been written on the subject of counseling services for special populations of re-entry women. This can partially be attributed to the fact that (a) until recently continuing education was primarily considered a white middle class phenomenon, and (b) that counseling services themselves were geared primarily towards serving white middle class 18-22 year olds.

In the last decade, there has been a concerted effort on behalf of many educational institutions to provide services which are based upon the distinctive concerns of special population groups on campus. Programs and services for minorities, the handicapped, and the elderly, etc. are now in existence on many campuses throughout the country, such as minority affairs offices, special services departments, elderhostel programs, etc.

Additionally, some continuing education programs have developed programs for special groups among the general re-entry population. In particular, some continuing education programs for women, such as that at San Jose City College (CA) and De Anza Community College (CA) have begun to offer remedial programs for women with language barriers, enabling them to work on their language skills prior to a full academic re-entry.

However, most re-entry programs do not have special counseling services for these populations. This may be due to:

- limited funds;
- few or no students which fall under the "special population" heading;
- inexperience or lack of substantive knowledge; many schools do not break down statistics as to the different groups among their re-entry population.

However, many re-entry women may use already existing channels for special populations with an institution to obtain academic, personal and vocational information and counseling. For example, a re-entry minority woman may be more comfortable in a minority affairs office than in an all-white re-entry program.

It is important in the coming years, as greater numbers of nontraditional women return to higher education, that institutions strive to provide services for all of its students. Counseling services which reflect an understanding of the unique situations and concerns of special populations in our society will surely help to ensure the success of all women returning to higher education.

What the Institution Can Do

- **Know who your special populations are among your general re-entry population.** This can help to define types of programs and services which are needed as well as helping to ensure an awareness of and sensitivity to particular groups among re-entry women. Many schools (the University of Tennessee, for example) gather data about their special populations through a questionnanre and/or evaluation form which is distributed to their re-entry population either prior to enrollment or upon completion of the academic program.
- **Make sure that there is some office, person, group or program on campus that offers information and/or counseling to each group** within the special population category. Many schools have minority affairs offices, programs for the handicapped, etc. or specific individuals to provide information, programs, and counseling for members of a particular special population group.
- **Provide information to special offices about re-entry women and services provided for them in their offices.**
- **Hold conferences on issues relevant to the concerns of special population groups.** Such conferences can provide an institutional and com-

munity framework for height
adult women and their changned awareness of
versity of Michigan Center foing lives. The Uni-
tion of Women has sponsored Continuing Educa-
ences in which topics have a number of confer-
search on Women," "Persincluded "New Re-
Women" and "The Black Woectives on Black
nan in Transition."

- **Counseling services or conti**
grams can offer workshops uing education pro-
of concern to special groups. courses on issues
as a way to bring together s This can also serve
interests who can help eachtudents with mutual
it may also serve as a form other. Additionally,
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- **Continuing education servic**
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- **Use pictures an information**
bers of special populations about re-entry mem-
reach materials. n publicity and out-

Sex Biases in Testing

Interest inventories are one
assessment tests used to determ a host of career
est. Over 3½ million[17] interest line vocational inter-
istered yearly. ventories are admin-

However, in recent years ma
used personality, career and voy of the commonly
have been criticized for bias ational interest tests
example, an interest test may pgainst women. For
the traditionally "female" lowrtray women only in
Thus, rather than provide a truepaying occupations.
and vocational interests, many assessment of career
perpetuate the existing stereotyf these tests simply
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Numerous tests have also been fields of employment.
respect to age and class. The und to be biased with
violate federal law (see next sectse of such tests may
ations). on on legal consider-

What the Institution Can Do

- **Persons providing vocationa**
ing services to returning w counseling and test-
themselves with the growimen should acquaint
about biased testing. In theg **body of literature**
significant research and litepast five years much
lished on evaluating and rature has been pub-
in tests. New, unbiased testeliminating sex bias
and guidelines have been have been designed,
using interest inventories tpublished for those
(Some of these are listed determine sex bias.
this paper.) n the bibliography of

Legal Considerations: Anti-discrimination Statutes and Counseling the Re-entry Woman

Two federal statutes prohibit discriminatory practices in the delivery of counseling services within a given institution. Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975 prohibit sex and age discrimination in programs at institutions which receive federal funds.

Title IX[18]

Title IX covers almost all areas of student treatment and activities. It specifically prohibits institutions from discriminating on the basis of sex in counseling or guiding students.

- Institutions may not use tests which use different materials for each sex, or which require different treatment for men and women. Exceptions are allowed if different materials used for each sex cover the same occupations *and* are essential to eliminate sex bias.
- If a school finds that a class has a disproportionate number of students of one sex, it must take "such action as is necessary to assure itself" that the disproportion is not the result of sex bias in counseling or testing.
- Schools are required to develop and use procedures to ensure that counseling and appraisal materials do not discriminate on the basis of sex.
- Programs aimed at persons continuing their education must be open to both sexes. (Many continuing education programs which were originally developed for women students have long been open to men as well.) Programs aimed at special groups such as older women, can continue, provided that men are not excluded if they wish to participate. A description of such a program or course might read, "This program is primarily aimed at women who have been out of the work force and are returning to school. However, men who believe they could benefit from this service and wish to participate may do so."

The Age Discrimination Act[19]

Age discrimination affects all people, but older women receive a "double dose" of discrimination--once because of their age and once again because of their sex. If the older woman is a member of a minority group or also handicapped, the problem is intensified. In education, age discrimination is not limited solely to senior citizens; it can begin as early as the mid-twenties, when a student may be labeled "too old" for a particular program or activity. The Age Discrimination Act of 1975 (effective January 1, 1979) prohibits "unreasonable discrimination on the basis of age in programs or activities receiving federal financial assistance." The Act, which contains some exemptions, is unique in that it does not define "age" to limit coverage to a particular group, such as those 65 or

older. It simply prohibits discrimination on the basis of age *at any age*, as long as that discrimination is "unreasonable." Thus, counseling programs which limit services based on age may be violating the Act.

In some schools, students have a choice as to whether to enter as a continuing education student or a regular student; in others, students are assigned to one or the other on the basis of age. Because there are often differences in the requirements and the kinds of courses offered, assignment based on age might be considered a violation of the Act.

What the Institution Can Do

- **Evaluate counseling programs, materials and tests for fairness concerning sex and age.**
- **Develop new materials and programs where necessary.**
- **Inform all personnel who do formal or informal counseling about the legal requirements of Title IX and the Age Discrimination Act.**
- **Evaluate classes and programs to ensure that any high or low numbers of re-entry students are not a result of sex bias in counseling or tests.**
- **Examine special programs for women and insure that men are allowed to participate if they wish to.**
- **Abolish age as a requirement for enrollment in continuing education programs** (rather than as a regular student). Develop other criteria or requirements based on student needs rather than age, or allow students to chose which program they prefer.

CONCLUSION

The current trends in higher education speak to a shifting population on college campuses throughout the country, of which re-entry women have, and will continue to be an increasingly important component. Services and programs which are specific to the numerous concerns of these women will help to guarantee them equal access and opportunity in higher education. The provision of counseling services which address the complex and often bewildering process of returning to school, and which also offer general information and support, will go far to ensure a personally and academically successful return to school.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Esther Benjamin, "Review Article: Barriers to Academic Re-entry Women and How to Overcome Them," Program on Women, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, October 1979.

[2] Carnegie Council on Policy Studies on Higher Education, *Three Thousand Futures: The Next 20 Years in Higher Education*, Jossey-Bass, Inc., 1980.

[3] Helen Astin, "Continuing Education and the Development of Adult Women," *The Counseling Psychologist*, 1974, Vol. 6, No. 1, p. 55-60.

[4] Further information on the deterrents to academic re-entry for women are included in the series of papers on re-entry women by the Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges, in press.

[5] For further information on special support services for re-entry women, see the paper on this subject published by the Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges, in press.

[6] See "Recruitment and Admissions: Opening the Door for Re-entry Women," Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges, 1980.

[7] Judith Brandenburg, "The Needs of Women Returning to School," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 1974, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 11-18.

[8] Astin, *op cit.*

[9] Karen Karelius-Schumacher, "Designing a Counseling Program for the Mature Woman Student," *Journal of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors*, Fall 1977, p. 28-31.

[10] Larry Lance, Joan Lourie, Cynthia Mayo, "Difficulties of Re-entry Students by Sex and Length of School Interruption," *Journal of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors*, Spring 1979, p. 39-43.

[11] Nancy Scott, "Returning Women Students: A Review of Research and Descriptive Studies," *Journal of the National Association for Women Deans, Administrators and Counselors*, Spring 1980, 31 pp.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] Brandenburg, *op cit.*

[14] Melanie Rawlins, "Life Made Easier for the Over-Thirty Undergraduates," *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, October 1979, p. 142.

[15] For a general discussion of additional support services for re-entry women, see the paper on special support needs, Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges, in press.

[16] Further information on special groups within the general re-entry category can be found in the paper on special populations and if also included throughout the series of papers on re-entry women, Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges, in press.

[17] D.J. Prediger and R.W. Johnson, *Alternatives to Sex-Restrictive Vocational Interest Assessment*. The American College Testing Program, 1979.

[18] Education Amendments of 1972 (Sections 901-907), 20 U.S.C. Sections 1681-86 (1972). The Title IX regulation can be found at 34 C.F.R. Part 106 and at 40 *Fed. Reg.* 21428-45 (June 4, 1975).

[19] Age Discrimination Act of 1975, 42 U.S.C. Sections 6101-6107 (1975). The final government-wide regulation for the Age Discrimination Act can be found at 45 C.F.R. Part 90 and at 44 *Fed. Reg.* 33768-88 (June 12, 1979). The Act also requires each federal agency to issue agency-specific regulations. At the time of this writing (Summer, 1980) agencies are in the process of issuing those regulations.

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The Counseling Needs of Re-entry Women

FIELD TEST

You can assist us in evaluating this paper by completing the following short questionnaire. If you have additional comments, please use the back of this page or add another sheet. It will help us if you return this questionnaire in the enclosed pre-paid envelope by September 30, 1980 to:

Women's Re-entry Project
Project on the Status and Education of Women
Association of American Colleges
1818 R Street, NW
Washington, DC 20009

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CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE

1. What is your primary identification? (Check One)

a. ☐ College president or other administrator. Specify title .....
b. ☐ College faculty member, lecturer, professor
c. ☐ College student
d. ☐ Elementary or secondary school teacher or administrator
e. ☐ State or local education agency employee
f. ☐ Federal employee
g. ☐ Other. Please specify .....

2. In addition, are you: (Check All That Apply)

a. ☐ An affirmative action officer or Title IX coordinator?
b. ☐ Directly involved in programs affecting re-entry women?
c. ☐ At a women's college?
d. ☐ A member of a *campus* committee on women, women's center or women's group?
e. ☐ A member of a *noncampus* women's group, women's center, or advocacy group (WEAL, NOW, National Women's Political Caucus, etc.)?
f. ☐ A member of a women's professional society or women's caucus or committee of an academic discipline?

3. If you are currently at a *postsecondary* institution:

a. Is it: ☐ public or ☐ private?
b. Is it a: ☐ university ☐ other 4-year college ☐ 2-year college or ☐ proprietary school?
c. Is the total enrollment: ☐ under 1,000 ☐ 1,000 to 5,000 ☐ 5,001 to 10,000 ☐ over 10,000?
d. In what state is your institution? .....

4. Do you think this is a useful paper?

a. YES (Respond to **ALL** reasons that apply)
1. ☐ to EVALUATE OR CHANGE POLICIES, such as .....
2. ☐ to START NEW PROGRAMS OR EFFORTS to assist re-entry women, such as .....
3. ☐ to REDESIGN OR IMPROVE EXISTING PROGRAMS OR SERVICES, such as .....
4. ☐ to IDENTIFY NEW RESOURCES
5. ☐ to IMPROVE RECRUITMENT of re-entry women to campus by .....
6. ☐ to TRAIN STAFF to work more effectively with issues regarding re-entry women
7. ☐ to EDUCATE OR INFORM OTHERS about the issues. Specify whom .....
8. ☐ to EDUCATE MYSELF ABOUT THE ISSUES
9. ☐ OTHER. Please specify .....

b. ☐ NO, this paper is not useful because .....

5. What, if any, *important* omissions were there from the paper? (Respond to *ALL* that apply)

a. ☐ NONE, it covered all aspects of the topic well.
b. ☐ ISSUES should be described more fully. Please indicate how .....
c. ☐ APPROACHES OR ALTERNATIVE REMEDIES were omitted. Please identify .....
d. ☐ IMPORTANT MODELS OR INNOVATIVE PROGRAMS were not mentioned. Please identify .....
e. ☐ KEY RESOURCES were not mentioned. Please identify .....
f. ☐ OTHER. Please describe any other omissions or suggested additions .....

6. Did you find the paper to be clear, well organized and easy to understand?

a. ☐ Yes
b. ☐ It could be improved by .....

7. If you found any factual errors or misleading statements in the paper, please identify them (indicating the page number, error or statement and include the correct information if possible). Use the other side of this page.

8. Please provide any additional comments or criticisms. Enclose other descriptive material, if desired, and use another sheet of paper if needed.